



An Incomplete History of My TV Career

Some would say I had the great fortune to be employed by KDAL-TV in Duluth, Minnesota between December 1968 and August, 1979. These were my formative years in the mundane world of small-market broadcast television. I traded long hours for pitiable wages, hoping to master the business.

Initially, I was hired as a Floor Boy. In the late 60s and 1970s there were no women working on the studio crew. My job title, which would be considered highly inappropriate now, was ordinary and indicative of the era.

Any thought of sex discrimination was foreign. Gender was never discussed except in crude terms I and my chauvinistic male coworkers used. It was a time when neither political correctness or sensitivity in regards to women in the workplace could be found.

As a Floor Boy, I was expected to do pretty much anything when asked by pretty much anyone above Floor Boy status, which was everybody else in the building. My principle duty was to fetch. Fetch coffee. Fetch donuts. Clean up the messes. Gloss over the grime

However inglorious, the job did allow me far closer access to showbiz than I'd ever dreamed possible. I was delighted to bow and scrape.

There were rewards for the lowly. When we finished any of the several food commercials the department produced each week, Floor Boys were allowed to partake.



But I had other plans for the freezer.

Occasionally, if the boss was feeling kindly, we were allowed to take home excess products, be it a loaf of bread or a pound of hamburger. When one earns \$1.65 an hour, every little bit helps.

Since part of the Floor Boy's job description included cleaning up the studio kitchen after a production, we had intimate knowledge as to the order of importance for those things kept in the working refrigerator/freezer.

Once something made it to the freezer the higher-paid staff lost interest, leaving the meager spoils to we Floor Boys.



Recall, if you're capable, the era when this story takes place...late 60s, and the 70s. **Flower Power!**

Sex, drugs and rock 'n roll.
All happening in Duluth.

Being a BabyBoomer, I was into the scene, but I had to play straight-man at work because... it was work. I pulled my hair back a la early Stephen Stills, keeping my freak flag low. Though television is a creative arena, filled with flawed and colorful characters, the bottom line is always profit. I understood the motives. I kept my inner workings secret.

At some point, my roommates and I, existing in a dive up on Second Street near St. Luke's, had scored a bunch of mind-scouring acid from a friend of ours, a guy named Jan. Jan was a muscle-bound scoundrel hippie from Minneapolis. He was in cahoots with a guy of equally nefarious character, a dude by the name of Jessie. Jessie would go on much later to become Governor of the State of Minnesota, but at the time he and Jan sold the finest acid.



We scrounged up some cash and scored about 50 hits of acid from Jan...various colors and strengths. He always gave you a review of each of his wares, a salesman's salesman.

One evening, while we were exploring our consciousness in our second story apartment, the Duluth Police came knocking at our door. FREAK OUT!

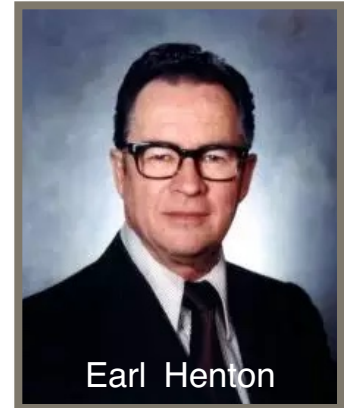
Fortunately for us, they were looking for someone else who they'd heard was at our digs. In spite of our distorted condition, no one was arrested. No one went to jail.

Despite our successful dodge, the level of paranoia climbed. Given our current state, we felt certain it was simply a matter of time before we'd be doing hard time in state prison.

The next day, after our psychedelic journey had receded, we discussed strategy for managing our stash and avoiding jail time, an early sort of disaster planning. In a flash of insight I said, "Hey, I know where I can stash feloniously-illegal, punishable-by-prison LSD."

Later that same day, I went in to work as a Floor Boy for the 10PM News, a show where I was verbally abused on a regular basis by Anchorman Earl Henton because I dropped the idiot cards as he was reading the St. Louis County Federal Savings and Loan commercial live.

Henton's tirade was alright by me. I was focused on my plan. After the News program ended, I sneaked over to the darkened Studio A. Across the back of the massive room was the studio kitchen set, replete with refrigerator/freezer.



I pulled some Alcoa Aluminum Foil from the box and carefully wrapped my trip-filled tin. Lifting the various frozen items that clogged the freezer shelves, I placed my package down at the bottom where no one would ever look.

AFTER ACTION REPORT: My plan worked. And, we got a double benefit. Not only were the illegal drugs not in my apartment where, if found, me and my fellow travelers would go away for years. The deep cold of the KDAL studio Frigidaire maintained the efficacy of our stash, guaranteeing a number of interesting and intriguing journeys through inner space.

Those Who Toil Yet to Whom No Glory Comes A Tale of Silent Hero

Everyone recalls the celebrities of the time...your Dottie Beckers, your Earl Hentons, the Little Joes and Heatwave Berlers. But few know how important the "behind the scenes" people are... the ones toiling anonymously, without the fanfare and the adulation. The star-making machinery requires many to create the illusion you see on your screen.



One such person was Emily Heikkinen, station bookkeeper. Emily resided on the second floor in a cramped, windowless office.

She was quiet, a reserved woman of Finnish descent, painfully penurious. She tracked cash flow with zealotry normally found only amongst the fervent. Emily was the Jesuit of Bookkeeping, guarding the station treasure.

Emily was the only person inside KDAL who knew more about the money than the company's president, Odin Ramsland. Ramsland was suspicious as to Heikkinen's mastery. Ramsland was competent, but he never understood money to the degree Heikkinen did.

Heikkenen understood this fact but she possessed such high moral character that she would never allow herself to use her skills and knowledge for personal gain. Emily's Rock solid Lutheran-Finnish is all that stood between Emily and perdition as she saw it. The mere mention of embezzlement terrified the loyal bookkeeper..



One of Heikkenen's tasks was to monitor the time sheets of the various hourly employees. Even though someone like myself, a lowly Floor Boy, was earning a \$1.65/hour, the minimum wage for the era, my immediate supervisor, Bruce would pour over my time sheet each Friday with a fine tooth comb, making certain I'd not cheated the company out of dime or two.

Weekly Time Card

Employee Name: (print) Hartman (Floor Boy) Dates Worked: 12-25 thru 12-31, 1968

Day	Date	In	Lunch - Out	Lunch - In	Out	Total	Comments
Mon.	12/25	6:00am	noon	1:00pm	10pm	15 hrs	I told you no overtime.
Tues.	12/26	6:00am	noon	1:00pm	10pm	15 hrs	This guy has no life.
Wed.	12/27	6:00am	noon	1:00pm	10pm	15 hrs	get rid of this after payday
Thurs.	12/28	6:00am	noon	1:00pm	10pm	15 hrs	Wage & Hours Inspectors getting twitchy
Fri.	12/29	6:00am	noon	1:00pm	10pm	15 hrs	w/OT this guy earns more than me
Sat.	12/30	6:00am	noon	1:00pm	10pm	15 hrs	what are they doing here all friggin' weekend?
Sun.	12/31	6:00am	noon	1:00pm	10pm	15 hrs	I said no more OT
							Weekly Total

Hourly rate: \$1.65

Employee Signature (blue or black ink, no pencil)

Once Nimmo had signed off on my time sheet, the increasingly smudged form would find its way to the desk of Production Manager, John LaForge. LaForge, known for his erudite linguistic abilities, would re-examine my time sheet, making certain Nimmo had done his job protecting Channel 3 from my larcenous ways. Once satisfied, LaForge would initial the time sheet and send it upstairs to Bookkeeping where Emily Heikkenen would use all her ability to verify that my claim on the station's treasure was legit.

On those times when I'd worked overtime, the examination grew far more intense. Overtime amounted to \$2.50 per hour...an exorbitant sum that shocked the Nordic sensibility of Emily Heikkenen. Whenever I turned in overtime, the inquisition was as painful as it was long. I never understood why it was the Company insisted I work overtime and then, when I asked to be compensated, I was treated like a common thief. Needless to say, Chief Bookkeeper Emily Heikkenen had a death grip on the money.

She would memo LaForge, inquiring why he ran such a profligate department. LaForge would memo Bruce, wondering why he couldn't get the work done in a 40-hour week. Nimmo would drag me aside and question my integrity even though it was he who had assigned me the hours in question.

My time sheet would travel up and down the organizational ladder, eventually landing on the desk of general manager Odin Ramsland, one of the trinity of station Founding Fathers. Ramsland was a feared and fearsome dictator, a man who loathed parting with a penny.

Eventually the dust settled. My time sheet would receive, the Emily Heikkenen stamp of approval. Just when it seemed improbable, payroll would be distributed. My supervisor would gently remind me not to work overtime even as he continued to ask. LaForge would bellow at Bruce to keep costs down. Heikkenen would harangue LaForge about his departmental expenses and Odin Ramsland...the man who stood to gain the most.... He did just that



Unintentional Consequences

I recall that in the early phase of my rather undistinguished broadcast career, I was in the Production Department at KDAL-TV, learning my trade with the likes of Jim Cuzzo, Mitch Dupre, George Gothner, Bruce Nimmo, Gordy Paymar and the entire cast of characters populating the studios which were immodestly referred to as the “**Broadcast Center for the Upper Midwest.**” Humility is rare in television.



One of the earliest shows I recall working on was called “Tree Top House,” hosted by a mild mannered woman known as Miss Jane.

As I was a lowly Floor Boy (no women in those days) I never knew Miss Jane’s real name. All I know is that once a month, Miss Jane, a comely woman, perhaps 35, would come to the studios on and we’d videotape four half-hour episodes of Tree Top House, saving Miss Jane the trouble of having to come in to do the show live.

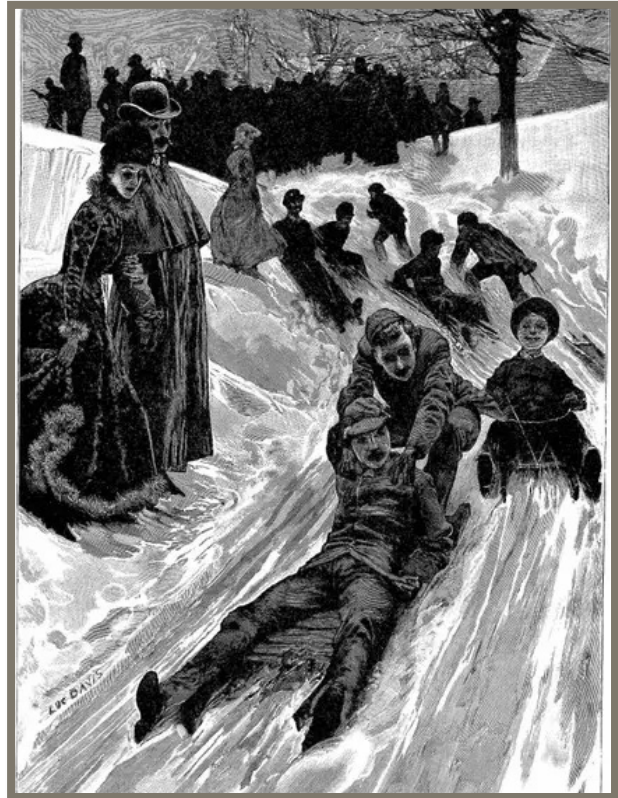
The show purported to be educational and was logged as such to satisfy the FCC that KDAL was not simply a money-making machine, and that the owners took their commitment to the community seriously, abiding by the strict rules governing “service to the community” that the FCC enforced vigorously in that era, unlike today where the agency is largely toothless.

On a particular Tree Top House taping day, we were suffering a Duluth winter's day. The thermometer did not approach zero for the day’s high. To honor the season, Miss Jane decided that for a portion of one of her shows she would discuss the making of a snowman. Constructing snowmen was a generally accepted way for mothers of that era to force their children out into the sub-zero conditions.

In fact, a great portion of a family's disposable income went to purchase clothing which could maintain a child's life in the Great Outdoors, all so mom could get some relief.

Miss Jane had a sort of blackboard on which she would write things in chalk. On this particular show, she had also brought along the three white circular pieces of felt to make the segments of the snowman. A part of her "blackboard" had been rigged to accept the sticky snowman pieces.

Remember that this show, Tree Top House, was viewed internally by staff and station management as a throwaway, designed to mollify the FCC and nothing else. No one took the effort seriously except Miss Jane who ardently believed that TV could be used to benefit society. The Management saw the TV station as a license to steal and tolerated Miss Jane's idealism as long as she could knock out four shows in a single recording session. Hoping to cement her reputation as a revered TV personality, Miss Jane mastered the art of Live TV well.



So, now Miss Jane places the first and largest segment of the snowman on the sticky board. Turning to the camera she says, "Okay, boys and girls...this is the first ball for our snowman."

Turning back to her task, she grabs the torso-portion of the snowman and places it on the sticky board so that it just barely intersects with the lowest segment. Jim Cuzzo, the director and a generally kind man, must have been in a foul mood that morning as he's was making derisive remarks about the show, mocking Miss Jane's efforts over the headsets.

The snowman denouement was about to happen with the placement of the third and final segment to create the snowman's head. Grasping the smallish white circle in her petite hands, Miss Jane turned to the camera and said, "Alright boys and girls...how many balls does a snowman have."

There was a rather loud off-camera guffaw from George Gothner, a cameraman who found humor in life's coarser corners. In an instant there was smothered guffaw from everyone in the all-male crew.

After a moment or two, Miss Jane grasped what she'd said. She turned deep crimson, her face flushed with embarrassment. She coughed and tittered nervously for and then, like the pro she was, she turned back to the sticky board, placed the head on top of the torso and, without a blink said, "There...a snowman has three balls."

Turning back to the camera, she signed off, "Join us again next week for Tree Top House, won't you. I'm Miss Jane...thanks for watching." Since there were no sponsors in the show, the episode aired without any editing. Miss Jane's mortification was witnessed by several hundred children who wondered why a snowman's balls would make a woman blush.



Where Television Follows, Others Lead

One summer, a typically slow period for TV sales and a time for the Production Department to do goof off, we were tasked to produce a "Sales Promotion" video that would be an internal-only video to be shared with our sister stations in Denver and the mothership, WGN-TV in Chicago.

The video was written and produced by Mary Jo White, a longtime veteran of the KDAL Production Department and a truly wonderful human being. Jim Cuzzo directed, with George Gothner and Bruce Nimmo on camera. Art Lantman, who later went on to be an executive at Glass Block, was the floor director.

The premise of the piece was: the KDAL Sales staff was really a gaggle of hookers in the KDAL house of Ill Repute. In those days, all studio jobs were held by males, while nearly all of the Writer/Producers were female. A blatant discriminatory pattern, but no one seemed too concerned at the time.



At any rate, all the female Writer/Producers were dressed in their nighties, lounging around the “Sales Office” and I, a fairly new member of the Floor Boy staff, played the “Madam” of the Whore House.

Mary Jo had stocked the set with several bottles of cheap wine to round out the set decor. I took it to mean that we were allowed to consume the wine as the videotaping process progressed. Audio engineer, Mitch Dupre, was my sidekick in this video, prompting me with sales-related questions which I then responded to with alleged “facts” touting the success of the KDAL sales department.

At some point, after having consumed several bottles of the horrid wine, Earl Henton, the Station Program Director and News anchor, popped in for a appearance to promote the station's Programming successes. We were getting shit-faced as the day wore on. Another visitor to our set was Sales Manager, Joe Golden. He was a boastful type, filled with the trash talk Salesmen need.

Sometime later, Station Manager Odin Ramsland, the champion of the Lutheran Work Ethic, was scheduled to drop in to this setting to discuss the overall Station situation. Remember that in the late 1960s and the 1970s, owning a TV station was a license to print money. Consequently, Station Manager Ramsland's main function was to protect that license from the Federal Communications Commission which, in those days, monitored station activities closely

On cue, Ramsland strolled into the whorehouse set and took a seat next to me. I was drunk by this time, but even in my condition, it was apparent that no one had clued Ramsland about the premise of our little video.



As I stared into to his angry, reddened face, seated there in my shorty nightgown, posing slurred questions to him, he seemed to grow more perturbed by the second. Ramsland was a dyed-in-the-wool conservative Lutheran who could barely tolerate laughter, never mind males dressed up as a women, with foam rubber breasts and, worst of all, getting drunk on company time.

Suffice to say, Ramsland was dismayed. Being as I was the “Madam,” I was not privy to the headset chatter that was going on. However, I could vaguely make out the sound of uproarious laughter coming from the Director's Booth as Cuzzo and Mary Jo yucked it up.

Once Ramsland had struggled through his contribution to the video, he quickly stormed out of the studio, a mean blue cloud surrounding him. I was so hammered by this point that it never occurred to me that Ramsland might be cranked-off by our shenanigans. Mitch and I saluted our efforts by pouring another glass of wine.

Since I was but a lowly Floor Boy, I never heard if there was any fallout from our sales video escapade. The same staffers showed up at work the next day and for years after, so I believe it is safe to say that no one was fired.

My dearest wish is to find a copy of that video. I don't know whatever became of it. I suspect that Ramsland ordered it to the Deep Archives, hoping it would never surface and would never smear his unsullied reputation. If anyone has a copy, please let me know.